

Message Text

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SUBJECT: ULF THROWS HAT IN POLITICAL RING

SUMMARY: THE UNITED LABOR FRONT HAS FINALLY DECLARED THAT IT WILL CONTEST NEXT MONTH'S PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS ON ITS OWN AND PUT FORWARD CANDIDATES IN 24 OF THE 36 CONSTITUENCIES. A FEW OF THE CANDIDATES WITH STRONG LABOR AND ETHNIC SUPPORT ARE GIVEN SOME CHANCE OF WINNING BUT THE OVER-ALL PROSPECTS OF THE LEFTIST COALITION ARE NOT BRIGHT. END SUMMARY.

1. THE UNITED LABOR FRONT (ULF), A RADICAL LABOR COALITION, ANNOUNCED ITS INTENTION TO CONTEST THE 1976 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS AND PRESENTED CANDIDATES FOR 24 OF THE 36 SEATS IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES AT A RALLY IN SAN FERNANDO ON AUGUST 13. BASED ON AN ALLIANCE BETWEEN THE UNIONS REPRESENTING SUGAR WORKERS, CANE FARMERS AND OIL WORKERS AND FORMED DURING THE LABOR DIFFICULTIES IN SUGAR AND OIL IN EARLY 1975, THE ULF PRESENTED ITS SLATE AS A RADICAL, WORKER'S ALTERNATIVE TO THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT. IT HAS NOT YET REFINED ITS PLATFORM BEYOND GENERAL DENUNCIATIONS OF CAPITALISM, FOREIGN OWNERSHIP OF TRINIDAD'S RESOURCES, AND
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EXPLOITATION OF WORKERS, HOWEVER.

2. MINDFUL THAT A SIMILAR EFFORT BY RADICAL LABOR IN 1966 WITH THE WORKERS AND FARMERS PARTY ENDED IN COMPLETE DEFEAT, THE ULF DECIDED TO NOMINATE CANDIDATES ONLY IN THOSE CONSTITUENCIES WHERE IT BELIEVED VICTORY WAS POSSIBLE. ULF LEADER BASDEO PANDAY, WHO IS PRESIDENT OF THE SUGAR WORKERS UNION, WILL CONTEST THE COUVA NORTH SEAT IN THE HEART OF THE LARGE ESTATE SUGAR RAISING AREA AND RAFFIQUKC SHAH, PRESIDENT OF THE CANE FARMERS ASSOCIATION, WILL STAND IN SIPARIA, A CENTER OF INDEPENDENT SUGAR CANE FARMING.

3. THE ULF HAS ATTRACTED SEVERAL RADICAL INTELLECTUALS WHO HAVE ADDED SOME DOGMATISM TO THE PARTY'S STATEMENTS AND TO ITS ANTI-IMPERIALIST FOREIGN POLICY LINE. TWO OF THESE, UNIVERSITY LECTURERS JAMES MILLETTE AND RICHARD JACOBS, WILL RUN IN FYZABAD AND AROUCA RESPECTIVELY. THE ONLY OTHER WELL-KNOWN ULF CANDIDATES ARE ALLEN ALEXANDER, A LEFTIST LAWYER ASSOCIATED WITH THE OWTU AND PRESENTLY PRESIDENT OF THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO BAR ASSOCIATION, AND THREE SENIOR OFFICERS OF THE OILFIELD WORKERS TRADE UNION (OWTU). THE REMAINING CANDIDATES ARE, FOR THE MOST PART, UNKNOWN YOUNG TRADE UNIONISTS, LAWYERS OR STUDENTS, INCLUDING THE SON OF THE ANGLICAN BISHOP OF TRINIDAD. TWO OF THE BIG NAMES IN THE ULF, OWTU PRESIDENT GEORGE WEEKES, AND TRANSPORT AND INDUSTRIAL WORKERS UNION PRESIDENT JOE YOUNG, HAVE SO FAR DECLINED TO STAND FOR ELECTION BUT BOTH WILL CAMPAIGN FOR THE ULF TICKET.

4. AS EXPECTED, THE ULF HAS CONCENTRATED ITS EFFORT IN CENTRAL AND SOUTH TRINIDAD WHICH HAVE BEEN THE CENTERS OF ITS STRENGTH AND WHICH HAVE HISTORICALLY ELECTED CANDIDATES OPPOSED TO THE RULING PEOPLE'S NATIONAL MOVEMENT (PNM). IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, HOWEVER, THE ULF WILL MEET STERN COMPETITION FROM THE MORE CONSERVATIVE OPPOSITION PARTIES, THE DEMOCRATIC LABOR PARTY (DLP), THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC LABOR PARTY (SDLP) AND THE WEST INDIAN NATIONAL PARTY (WINP), ALL OF WHOM HAVE DECLARED THEIR STRONG OPPOSITION TO THE RADICALISM PREACHED BY THE ULF. PANDAY WILL BE MATCHED AGAINST DLP LEADER SIMBHOONATH CAPILDEO IN COUVA NORTH AND SHAH WILL FIGHT BOTH SDLP LEADER VERNON JAMADAR AND DLP GENERAL SECRETARY ALLOY LEQUAY IN SIPARIA. FACE-OFFS OF LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THIS NATURE RAISE THE POSSIBILITY THAT A SPLIT IN THE OPPOSITION VOTE IN THESE CONSTITUENCIES COULD ALLOW A PNM CANDIDATE TO SQUEAK INTO OFFICE WITH A RELATIVELY SMALL PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULAR VOTE SINCE ONLY A PLURALITY OF THE BALLOTS CAST IS REQUIRED FOR ELECTION.

5. COMMENT: AT THE PRESENT TIME THE ULF IS NOT EXPECTED TO BE A SERIOUS CONTENDER IN MORE THAN A FEW SEATS.

PANDAY AND SHAH BOTH HAVE A GREAT DEAL OF SUPPORT IN THEIR SUGAR-BELT CONSTITUENCIES BECAUSE OF THEIR LEADERSHIP OF THE TWO MAJOR ORGANIZATIONS OF SUGAR WORKERS AND CANE FARMERS AND BECAUSE OF THEIR ETHNIC TIES TO THE PREDOMINATLY EAST INDIAN RESIDENTS IN THESE AREAS. ALLEN ALEXANDER, A RESPECTED LAWYER WITH A REPUTATION FOR HELPING PEOPLE, IS ALSO CONSIDERED TO HAVE A GOOD CHANCE TO WIN IN POINT FORTIN, AN OIL PRODUCING AREA IN WHICH THE TRINTOC REFINERY IS LOCATED. THE OTHER CANDIDATES, HOWEVER, ARE GIVEN VERY LITTLE CHANCE OF SUCCESS UNLESS THE PARTY CAN DO SOMETHING IT HAS NOT BEEN ABLE TO DO SO FAR, CONVINCE THE PUBLIC THAT IT REPRESENTS AN ELECTABLE ALTERNATIVE TO THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT.

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